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FM AMEMBASSY ASMARA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9681  
INFO RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE  
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 0444  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC  
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RUMICEA/JICCENT MACDILL AFB FL  
RUEPADJ/CJTF-HOA J2X CAMP LEMONIER DJ

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 000277

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/E  
LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/22/2018  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [CASC](#) [EG](#) [ER](#)  
SUBJECT: DETAINED EGYPTIAN SAILORS RETURN HOME

Classified By: CDA Jennifer A. McIntyre for reason 1.4(d).

¶1. (C) On May 21, Egyptian DCM Hassam Abdallah Nooreldin told Poloff that the 40 Egyptian sailors, who were arrested in spring 2007 and detained for a year in the port city of Massawa by the Eritrean government, have finally been released and returned to Egypt. The sailors were never charged with a crime, although the GSE alleged to the Embassy that they had been illegally fishing in Eritrean waters. Hassam stated that the sailors were severely undernourished, as they had been given only "a very small amount of lentils" each day of their detention. While imprisoned on their ship, five of the sailors were forced to wear the uniforms of the Eritrean military and stand guard over the remaining 35 sailors under threat of physical torture. Hassam also mentioned that one of the sailors was suffering extreme leg injuries caused by the method in which he was tied, and would require medical treatment.

¶2. (C) Hassam said the sailors were told daily by their Eritrean jailers that the Egyptian Embassy had made no effort to contact them, and they would be released as soon as their Embassy and government showed concern for their well-being. (Note: The Egyptian Embassy and government made repeated requests for over a year for consular access to the sailors, requests that were never granted. An Egyptian delegation visited Eritrea in early May 2008, for the primary purpose of discussing this issue with President Isaias. Only by the verbal order of President Isaias himself were the Egyptians finally able to secure the release of their citizens. The Egyptian Embassy never did gain consular access; the sailors were released and transported to Asmara -- at which point, the Embassy was able to debrief them and arrange their returns to Egypt. End Note.)

MCINTYRE